

Take a bit of Talmud, add a spice of social psychology and a generous helping of a mass communications medium more powerful than anything hitherto imaginable, and what do you have?

## A New Religion

Prof. Arthur Butz

An interesting objection is the claim that nobody would dare invent such a tale as the six million legend; nobody has the extraordinary imagination required and, even if he did, the obvious risk in telling such gigantic lies should dissuade him. The argument amounts to the claim that the mere existence of the legend implies the truth of its essentials, so I suppose that we can classify it as the hoaxers' ontological argument.

What is interesting about this objection is its superficially logical quality. Indeed I imagine that this calculation accounts in good measure for the widespread acceptance of the legend; people assume that nobody would be so brazen as to invent such lies. Nevertheless the logic is not sound, for history affords us numerous examples of popular acceptance of gigantic lies, and in this connection we can again cite witchcraft hysteria as precedent for the psychological essential of the six million hoax.

It is ironic that Hitler anticipated the psychology of the "big lie" in his remarks on the subject in Chapter X of *Mein Kampf*. It is also ironic that the most mind-boggling accounts of exterminations appear in the Jewish Talmudic literature in connection with the last two of the three great Jewish revolts against Rome, the Diaspora revolt of 115-117 AD and the Palestine revolt of 132-135 AD. In connection with the Palestine revolt of 66-70 AD the Talmudic writings do nothing more than bewail the loss of the temple in Jerusalem and discuss implications of the loss for Jewish law. A good discussion of the three reports is given in Michael Grant's *The Jews in the Roman World*.

According to the ancient accounts (mainly Cassius Dio, who wrote around 200 AD, and Eusebius, the early fourth century Bishop of Caesarea) the Diaspora revolt started in Cyrenaica (northeast Libya) at a time when the Emperor Trajan had, for the purposes of annexing Parthia and its valuable Mesopotamian territory, constituted a huge eastern army at the price of withdrawing many small contingents which had served to keep order in various parts of the Empire. The Jews attacked the Greek and Roman civilian population and it is said that they

killed 220,000 in Cyrenaica, amusing themselves in various gruesome ways. The revolt then spread to Egypt where the Jews killed an unknown number, and to Cyprus, where they are said to have killed 240,000. In Alexandria, however, the predominantly Greek population gained control of events and are said to have massacred that city. Recent archeological evidence indicates that the ancient accounts are not exaggerated.

The Talmud says almost nothing about this revolt, except to give the number of Jews killed in Alexandria as “sixty myriads on sixty myriads, twice as many as went forth from Egypt,” i.e. 1,200,000 on the assumption that addition and not multiplication is intended. The killings are blamed on “the Emperor Hadrian,” which may be due to the fact that the Hadrian was at the time the commander of Trajan’s eastern army and succeeded Trajan as Emperor when Trajan died in 117, possibly before the final suppression of the revolt.

The figure given for the number of Jewish victims is obviously exaggerated for, while it is usually difficult to be more than approximately correct in estimating the population of ancient cities, Alexandria of the period had a population of 500,000 or more, with an upper bound of one million a reasonable one to assume because that was the approximate population of the city of Rome, a figure concerning which there is also some uncertainty, but if Rome ever attained a population significantly greater than one million, it never got near two million. The 1,200,000 martyred Jews may seem a brazen invention but you haven’t seen anything yet.

The next great revolt was in Palestine in 132-135 and was a serious attempt by its leader, Bar-Kokhba, to set up a Jewish state with himself as king, although he eventually claimed to be the Messiah. During the revolt he made laws, issued money, and performed the other regular functions of government.

Bar-Kokhba’s end came in 135. Jerusalem not being suitable to withstand a siege, he led the remnants of his army to Bathar (the present Bittir), which is located on

high ground about ten miles southwest of Jerusalem, 25 miles from the Dead Sea and 35 miles from the Mediterranean. The dimensions of the ancient town were roughly rectangular, with a north-south length of about 600 meters and an east-west width of about 200 metres. The south half of the town was fortified. These dimensions plus the fact of the estimates for the Jewish population of Palestine of the time ranged from a low of 500,000 to a high of 2.5 million make it unlikely that Bar-Kokhba's Bethar army numbered as many as 50,000 men.

The Romans laid siege to Bethar in the summer of 135 and Bar-Kokhba's resistance collapsed in August. The Romans broke into the fortress and Bar-Kokhba was killed in that final battle.

For general reasons it seems unlikely that the Romans carried out a massacre of the Jewish population of Bethar. The only "evidence" for a general massacre occurs in the Talmudic literature (including in this context the Midrash Rabbah) which for reasons unknown comments extensively on the siege of Bethar and its supposed aftermath. Except where noted, the Talmudic passages are reproduced in the Appendix to the book Bar-Kokhba by the archaeologist Yigael Yadin. The size of Bar-Kokhba's Bethar army is given as 200,000 men. Bar-Kokhba is said to have been so tough that, when the Romans catapulted missiles into his fort, he would intercept the missiles with his knee with such force that he would knock them back into the faces of the astonished Romans, killing many. The Talmud goes on to claim that the number of Jews killed by the Romans after the fortress fell was 4 billion "or as some say" 40 million, while the Midrash Rabbah reports 800 million martyred Jews. In order to reassure us that these figures are given in earnest, the necessarily accompanying events are set forth. The blood of the slain Jews reached to the nostrils of the Romans' horses and then, like a tidal wave, plunged a distance of one mile or four miles to the sea, carrying large boulders along with it, and staining the sea a distance of four miles out.

The Jewish school children of Bethar, according to the Talmudic literature, were of course not spared by the Romans, who are said to have wrapped each of them

in his scroll, and then burned all of them, the number of these school children having been 64 million or at least 150,000 (the approximate present public school population of Washington, D.C.).

The Romans matched the Germans in efficiency, for the bodies of the slain Jews were used to build a fence around Hadrian's vineyard, which is said to have been eighteen miles square, and blood saved over from the tidal wave was used to fertilize Roman vineyards for seven years. Shades of soap, glue and fertilizer factories!

It is also claimed that Bar-Kokhba (usually referred to in the Talmudic literature as Bar-Koziba – it is still not clear what his real name was) was killed by rabbis for falsely claiming to be the Messiah.

From Arthur R. Butz: *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* , Historical Review Press, 1976, pp. 245-247